

Foresight For Eyesight

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It's easy to take for granted the things in our lives we depend on every day and yet give very little thought. Imagine for a moment you could never see the face of your spouse or children again. You could never watch a snowfall in the winter or see the orange sun go down over the ocean during a warm summer evening. What would it be like if you couldn't watch your favorite sports team or NASCAR driver, see your favorite film stars or television programs, or read the morning newspaper or a best-selling novel by your favorite author? Most of us don't give much thought to the significance of such a loss, yet catastrophic eye injuries occur in the workplace every day.

According to the U.S. Department of Labor's Occupational Safety and Health Administration Web site, thousands of individuals are blinded each year by work-related eye injuries. These injuries result in more than \$300 million annually in lost production, medical expenses and worker's compensation. The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health points out on the Centers for Disease Control Web site that most workplace eye injuries are caused by small pieces of wood, metal or cement striking or abrading the eye. Objects that penetrate the eyes can result in permanent blindness.

Federal law mandates employers provide their workers a safe and healthful work environment. As such, employers must conduct workplace assessments to identify hazards where eye and face protection are needed. OSHA describes the common types of workplace hazards as heat, chemicals, dust and optical radiation.

Once the employer identifies any of these hazards during an assessment, consideration must be given to the risk of exposure, the potential for multiple exposures and determining the highest level of required protection. The first course of action is to engineer out the identified hazard, including using shields and guards if possible. If this solution isn't possible, the employer must provide the appropriate eye or face protection and employee training.

Employees who wear prescription eyewear also must wear eye protection. Eye protection that fits comfortably over prescription eyewear is available, as are safety goggles and spectacles incorporating prescription lenses. Eye and face protection issued to employees must comply with the American National Standards Institute ANSI Z-87.1 1989 standard if purchased after July 5, 1994, or ANSI Z87.1-1968 if purchased before July 5, 1994.

OSHA Standard 1910.132(f) requires that employers train employees to know when protection is necessary, along with what type is needed and how it should be worn. Employees also must learn proper care, useful life and proper disposal of their protective equipment. That training, which should be presented in a manner easily understood by employees, must be provided by a knowledgeable person. Employees who receive training must demonstrate how to properly use their protective equipment before working in an area where it's required. Training must be certified for each employee and include documentation containing the employee's training date and certification subject.



While the consequences described above are severe and not all eye injuries result in total blindness, eyesight is a precious gift that must be protected. Employers must make every effort to protect their workers and ensure appropriate information and necessary resources are available to eliminate workplace eye injuries.

Protecting Your Eyes

There really isn't much to be said about protecting your eyes other than you'd be foolish not to do so at all times while on the job. Eye protection devices have been used in the construction industry since 1910. While the original eye protection devices were somewhat limited, today there are styles for every type of exposure. Many tasks require that workers wear eye protection, including:

- Chipping, sledging and hammering metal, stone or concrete
- Use of manual, pneumatic and power impact tools
- Caulking, brushing and grinding
- Drilling, scaling and scraping
- Babbitting, soldering and casting hot metals
- Handling acids, caustics and creosoted materials
- Gas welding, cutting and brazing
- Drilling overhead
- Working in excessively dusty environments
- Electric arc welding and cutting and other operations that expose the eyes to flying particles, dust, hot liquids, molten substances, gases, fumes and liquids

Some people just don't like to wear safety glasses and goggles. One complaint is goggles tend to fog up. Fogging happens when sweat vaporizes and coats the inside of the lens. If you have this problem with goggles and glasses, wear a handkerchief or sweatband around your forehead to keep perspiration out.

Another complaint is eye protection devices are uncomfortable, but usually this is because they don't fit properly. Make sure you have the device properly adjusted for the correct fit or simply get another that fits better. You can see a lot better out of a properly fitted eye protection device than you can out of a glass eye.

Like all safety devices, eye protection is there for you and your eyes. Be smart and use eye protection at all times when on the job. What have you got to lose? Your sight?

---Did You Know

According to the American National Standards Institute, workplace eye injuries are a leading cause of eye trauma, vision loss and blindness. An estimated 2,000 eye injuries occur in the workplace every day, but according to the American Academy of Ophthalmology, nearly 90 percent of all eye injuries could've been prevented by using the right kind of protective eyewear.